

Congressman Boucher Joins with Bland County Officials to Launch Southwest Virginia's First Municipal Mesh Networking Wi-Fi Facility

STATEMENT OF CONGRESSMAN RICK BOUCHER

Bland County Wireless Network Launch

Bland, Virginia

May 16, 2006

I am pleased to return to Bland this morning to join with Bland County officials in the formal launch of a truly innovative means of providing wireless high-speed Internet access to the residents and businesses in the Bland community. The new wireless network will be available to those within a three to four block radius of the Bland County Courthouse at no cost.

The wireless hotspot in Bland employs a new low-cost, highly efficient technology known as mesh networking to deliver high-speed wireless Internet access to residents and businesses in Bland. This cutting-edge technology holds great promise for our region. I recently hosted well attended workshops in 3 locations across the district to provide information about mesh networking , and I would mention that Bland County Administrator Jonathan Sweet was among those who participated. Bland County will be the first locality in Southwest Virginia to employ mesh network architecture for its wireless services.

The mesh units are small and relatively inexpensive. Because the mesh units communicate with each other wirelessly, each becomes a point from which the network can be expanded outward. Accordingly, Bland County can easily expand its community network simply by adding easy to install units as more funds become available.

The economic success of rural communities has long been determined by access to major arteries of commerce. In earlier eras, proximity to canals, then railroads, and then major interstate highways determined the potential for economic development. In the 21st Century, broadband will become the major artery of commerce, and access to broadband services is critical for an economically successful community.

Ten years ago, I encouraged local governments throughout the Ninth District to find a means of deploying broadband networks so that affordable high-speed Internet access would be available to businesses and residents throughout our region. My goal in making this recommendation was to set our region apart in comparison to other rural areas of the nation for the purpose of attracting industries seeking locations for expansion, attracting new companies with technology-based jobs, and aiding locally-owned small businesses in expanding operations.

Today, many Ninth District communities are making strides in the deployment of broadband networks, with the

construction of fiber-optic backbones in many of our counties; however, there are many homes and businesses that will not be reached by the fiber-optic backbone. This gap is commonly referred to as the "last mile," and wireless technology is an excellent means of deploying high-speed Internet services to bridge this gap. Bland County is now a model of how low cost services can be offered virtually anywhere.

The total cost of the new wireless hotspot is \$6000, all of which has been provided by the Bland County Board of Supervisors. The County will maintain the new network after it is launched, and services will be available at no cost to residents, businesses and churches within a short distance from the Courthouse, where we gather today, as well as to the Bland County Library. Visitors to Bland, including hikers of the Appalachian Trail, will also be able to access the network. The availability of high-speed Internet access at no cost will be an attractive feature to many travelers who pass by the town on the Appalachian Trail or Interstate 77.

Leading to today's formal launch, Trificient Technologies has installed router modules on the Bland County communications tower located here at the Courthouse. Sprint DSL is providing the backbone for this system, which will allow the modules to transmit wireless Internet services within three to four blocks of the tower. The mesh network architecture system enables the County to expand the wireless network in any direction, and the County's Economic Development Authority has begun to discuss extending services to more residents throughout the County after this first phase of the wireless network becomes fully operational.

I would like to take the opportunity of these remarks to recognize a number of individuals who have been instrumental in the launch we celebrate today.

First, I want to commend the Bland County Board of Supervisors for their leadership and foresight in bringing this cutting-edge technology to Bland County.

I also want to recognize Jonathan Sweet, County Administrator, and Chris Sutphin, the County's technology specialist, for their efforts to bring this new service to Bland.

I would also like to thank Howard Robertson with Tropos, who assisted with my workshops on this technology and who is the vendor of equipment for the County's new wireless network. Charlie Brown with Trificient Technologies also deserves our recognition today for the excellent work he has done in the construction of the network.

The new wireless network we officially launch today marks another major step forward in our work to improve the quality of life for Southwest Virginians. I want to commend all here for the success of the project and offer special congratulations to the residents and business owners in Bland who will benefit tremendously from the new service that is now available to them.

